

## II. NOTE

---

“HOLINESS BEFITS YOUR HOUSE” (PS. 92 [93]: 5):  
A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE APSE INSCRIPTION AT  
MREN

by

CHRISTINA MARANCI

During June of 2013, I was able to make field trips to the seventh-century Armenian church of Mren next to the village of Karabağ in the Kars province of present-day eastern Turkey (Fig. 1)<sup>1</sup>. The recent collapse of the south façade, tragic as it was, illuminated the sanctuary of the church sufficiently to reveal the wall paintings, which feature the standing Christ above a row of evangelists and saints. I described this pictorial program in a previous issue of this journal;<sup>2</sup> in the following essay, I report on the inscription located on the arch above the apse.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first mention of the inscription in the scholarly literature. The earliest epigraphic studies of Mren by Nikolai Marr and Nersēs Sargisean addressed only the exterior epigraphy.<sup>3</sup> The 1971 article on Mren by Jean-Michel and Nicole Thierry offered the most substantial account of the wall painting (until my above-mentioned essay) but they do not make mention of this text, nor does it appear in Timothy Greenwood’s recent essay on Armenian inscriptions.<sup>4</sup> It is also not recorded in the 2012 documentary article on Mren by Samvel Karabetyan in the journal *Vardsk/Duty of Soul*.<sup>5</sup> This general silence is presumably to be explained by the same reason that much of the apse painting was not visible to previous observers: because before the collapse of the south façade, the interior was too dark for close examination of the wall surfaces.

<sup>1</sup> I particularly wish to thank Armen Aroyan and Steven Sim for making it possible for me to visit Mren. Steven Sim’s photographs and transcription of the inscription were essential to its decipherment. I would also like to thank Robert Thomson, Tim Greenwood, and Robert Dulgarian for their help with this essay, and Jean-Pierre Mahé for encouraging me to submit it to the *Revue*.

<sup>2</sup> Maranci (2013/14).

<sup>3</sup> Marr (1893), p. 82-83; and Sargisean (1864), p. 194-200.

<sup>4</sup> Thierry and Thierry (1971); Greenwood (2004).

<sup>5</sup> Karapetyan (2012).

The following remarks must be taken as preliminary until a full and thorough investigation of the church of Mren can be made. At present, the location of the church in a restricted zone on the closed border between the Turkish and Armenian Republics means that visits to the site are only made with difficulty. Yet the rewards of even a hasty trip are evident. Aside from the published materials concerning its architecture, exterior sculpture, and fresco decoration, a wealth of painted epigraphy on the interior of the church has yet to be documented.<sup>6</sup> One can only imagine what more might be discovered during a proper survey of the monument. The greatest challenge, however, is the extremely compromised state of the building. For Mren, time is running out, and this essay should be taken as a call, made by others as well, to preserve the monument and encourage further work.<sup>7</sup>

The Mren inscription is located in the east end of the church on the arch crowning the apsidal curvature, on the surface facing the interior (Fig. 2). The semicircular arch rises approximately 3.5 meters in height, as measured from the capitals of attached piers at the north and south (themselves located about 9.75 meters from the pavement).<sup>8</sup> The height of the surface of the arch band is approximately 40 centimeters, and it is framed by upper and lower painted strips of dark color. The letters are painted in dark or black color and are in *erkat'agir* script (Fig. 3). The letters measure not more than 25 centimeters high, and are spaced generously (on average, they are separated from each other by one half to one third of the width of a letter form).

Presumably these letters once ran around the semicircle of the arch, but damage to the wall surface prevented me from discerning any on the left side. The first visible letter appears slightly to the left of the apex of the arch, and, with two lacunae, is then followed with a series of almost completely readable letters until the bottom right. There are nineteen visible letters. The first letters preserve the last part of a nominative abstract noun "...ԲՈՒԹԻՆ"; the last visible fragment preserves the sequence of letters "ԴԵՐԿԱՅՆԱՒՈՐՄ". Based on this evidence, I propose that the complete inscription was a quotation from Psalm 92 (93): 5:

<sup>6</sup> I thank Steven Sim for bringing this material to my attention.

<sup>7</sup> Samvel Karapetyan has rightly called for an "SOS" for this monument (Karapetyan, 2012, p. 63).

<sup>8</sup> These approximate numbers are based on the measurements of the apse made by Steven Sim on our trip to Mren in July of 2013.

[ՏԱՆՔՈՒՄՎԱՅԵԼԷՄՐ]ԲՈՒԹԻՒՆ[ՏԷՐԸՆ]ԴԵՐԿԱՅՆԱՒՈՒՐՍ.

*Saṇ քում վայելէ սրբութիւն Տէր ընդ երկայն աւուրս.*

Holiness befits your house, Lord, for the length of days.

When was this inscription painted? It should not necessarily be assumed that the text is seventh century; much more close physical inspection should be done to ascertain that. As is well known, Mren underwent periods of restoration, most prominently in the tenth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup> It is possible that the text was added during the period of Bagratid control of the settlement of Mren, a period well attested in the exterior epigraphy of the church.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, there is nothing in the paleography, as far as I can see, distinguishing the text from seventh-century Armenian inscriptions, whether lapidary, of which there are many, or painted (Fig. 4). The letterforms are bold and upright. They are carefully painted with lines of varying thickness. The Ո (O) is thinner at its arched top, reflecting perhaps the penning convention of starting at top and working down the two sides.<sup>11</sup> The Ն (N) features a left-hand upright with a strong hook to the left. The Ե (E) is particularly well preserved and elegant. The main upright terminates at the top with a left tick, and the horizontal curves slightly downward before broadening dramatically into a triangular finishing stroke. The Ա (A) features a looped righthand ascender, the inner line of which is quite thin. Concerning the paleography of these and other letters, what we find is quite comparable to mid-seventh-century Armenian inscriptions in stone, such as the exterior west façade inscription at Mren itself, the sundial inscription at Zuart‘noc‘ (c.641-661), and the east façade foundation inscription of Aruč (c. 660).<sup>12</sup>

The most useful comparison, however, is with the painted inscription in the apse of Aruč (Fig. 5).<sup>13</sup> The wall painting there features a standing Christ holding in his left hand an open scroll which preserves the Armenian text of John 14:21: “He who has my commandments and keeps

<sup>9</sup> For a brief review of the historical phases of the settlement of Mren, see Thierry and Thierry (1971), p. 44-51.

<sup>10</sup> For transcriptions of this epigraphy, and commentary, see the works of Marr and Sargisean, as in note 3 and in the bibliography.

<sup>11</sup> I rely here primarily on Kouymjian-Lehmann-Stone (2001).

<sup>12</sup> For photographs and transcriptions of these texts, as well as bibliography, see Greenwood (2004); for the Mren west façade inscription, p. 83; for the Zuart‘noc‘ sundial, p. 84; and for Aruč, p. 86.

<sup>13</sup> For discussion and bibliography, see Donabédian (2008), p. 126 and note 168; and Mat‘evosyan (1987).

them is he who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.” Although that text too is faded and damaged, one can discern there the same bold *erkat’agir* that is found on the arch at Mren. Quite similar are the proportions of the letters, their tapering lines, and the width of spacing between them.

Another reason to date the Mren inscription to the seventh century is the strong relationship of the inscription to the painted program within which it is nested. Below the arch inscription, at the outer edge of the semi-dome, is a row of medallions enclosing busts of sacred figures.<sup>14</sup> The zone above the arch, on its outer profile, is decorated with an undulating ribbon motif, of which enough is preserved to discern careful modulations of color and shading. The format and style of both medallions and ribbon find precedents in the apsidal decoration of T’alin (c. 690) and, farther afield, in the monumental arts of Ravenna (particularly San Vitale) and the sixth-century apse mosaic of Saint Catherine’s on Mount Sinai. It is this level of kinship that prompted Jean-Michel and Nicole Thierry to refer to the paintings at Mren as exemplifying “a distinctive form of post-Justinianic art,” and which have led scholars generally to agree on their seventh-century date.<sup>15</sup> The evidence of the wall paintings, together with the paleographical remarks made above, therefore offer a strong basis on which to situate the inscription within the original period of church construction.

#### OTHER INSCRIPTIONS OF PS. 92(93): 5

If this seventh-century date is correct, the arch inscription at Mren would represent the earliest known direct quotation of the Bible in an Armenophone epigraphic context. However, an important local precedent is found in a Greek inscription of Psalm 92(93): 5 at the three-aisled basilica of Ereroyk’. Located in the Ani-Pemza region of the Armenian Republic, Ereroyk’ is typically dated by scholars from the end of the fifth to the sixth century.<sup>16</sup> At the extreme eastern end of the south façade of the church, just at the corner of the building, the psalm quotation appears in five lines within a rectangular frame with dovetails at either side (Fig. 6).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See Thierry and Thierry (1971), p. 75-77, fig. 36; and Maranci (2013/14), figs. 16 and 17.

<sup>15</sup> Thierry and Thierry (1971), p. 77; Donabédian (2008), p. 220.

<sup>16</sup> See most recently Donabédian et al. (2012).

<sup>17</sup> See Greenwood (2004), p. 59, note 162, p. 87-88, fig. 16.

+ ΤΩΟΙΚΩCOY /ΠΡΕΠΙΑΓΙΑΣ/ΜΑΚΕΕΙCΜΑΚ/ΡΟΤΗΤΑΗ/  
 ΜΕΡ{Ε}ΩΝ +  
 τῷ οἴκῳ σου πρέπει ἁγίασμα, Κύριε, εἰς μακρότητα ἡμερῶν.

Holiness befits your house, O Lord, for the length of days.

In addition to the Ereroyk' text, at least thirteen other Greek inscriptions in the Mediterranean and Near East cite Psalm 92(93): 5. Because this essay introduces a new member to the group, albeit in Armenian, it seems useful to note each known text below.<sup>18</sup> They may be grouped, roughly, into three categories: 1) fifth- and sixth-century inscriptions in stone or mosaic pavements in Cilicia, Syria, Lebanon, North Africa, and the Holy Land; 2) the early Byzantine mosaic inscription in the arch at the church of the Dormition in Nicaea, dated before 726; and 3) Byzantine inscriptions in Thrace, Greece, and Sicily, either painted or mosaic, and located (as at Nicaea) in the elevation of the apse. What will become clear from this comparative section is the filiation of the Mren inscription, in terms of design and location, with second and third groups of evidence.

1. One text appears on a fragmentary chancel plaque from the region of Elaiussa-Sebaste, in western Cilicia.<sup>19</sup> Now held in the museum of Erdemli, its original provenance is unknown. The text features an abbreviated version of the psalm 92(93): 5: “Holiness befits your house” (τῷ οἴκῳ σου πρέπει ἁγίασμα). It appears on the upper right surface of plaque, bearing additional inscriptions and a cross. The cataloguers of this plaque suggest a date between the fifth and sixth century.<sup>20</sup>

2. Another example is located on the northeast church at Deir Siman (Telanissos) in Syria. It is incised, as at Ereroyk', on a dovetail plate and located on the lintel of the eastern doorway in the southern wall of the church. As Greenwood has noted, the layout of this inscription is similar to Ereroyk'. The Deir Siman inscription, however, features the same shortened selection of the psalm as found on the Erdemli chancel plaque. It is flanked by the abbreviations “XC” and “NI”. This inscription probably dates to the late fifth century or sixth century.<sup>21</sup>

3. The psalm text also appears on the mosaic pavement of Qabr Hiram in Lebanon and is dated to 575 AD.<sup>22</sup> It is located in the nave of the

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; note 162 also provides a helpful list of these inscriptions.

<sup>19</sup> Dagron-Feissel (1987), p. 55, cat. 23, pl. XII.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Jalabert-Mouterde (1929), p. 414.

<sup>22</sup> Donceel-Voûte (1998), p. 411-420; for the inscription, see p. 416.

three-aisled basilica of Saint Christopher, within a colonnaded choir positioned just in front of the sanctuary. The text runs in a single line just within the choir, behind the four western columns.<sup>23</sup> This text is the same abbreviated selection of the psalm as found in inscriptions 1 and 2.

4. The mosaic inscription at Askhelon-Barne'a is the earliest dated member of the group.<sup>24</sup> The inscription appears in the pavement of the narthex of a church building. Framed within in a rectangular panel, the text includes the conclusion "the length of days". It comprises two lines, and is followed by a short text giving the year of completion as 493 AD.

5. The same psalm text appears in a mosaic inscription in the pavement of a sixth-century church in Bahan, Israel.<sup>25</sup> Located in the church nave, this inscription is comprised of ten lines enclosed within a rhomboid frame.

6. At the site of Horvat, in the southwest Negev, the text appears in a mosaic pavement in the nave of the church, just in front of the altar.<sup>26</sup> The inscription comprises the first line of a six-line inscription, and bears the abbreviated version of the psalm text, without the ending "the length of days". After this comes a second phrase: "τὰ σὰ ἐκ τῶν σῶν Σοι προσφέρωμεν", translated by Tzaferis, excavator of the site, as "bringing before thee thine of thine all".<sup>27</sup> This is a central part of the anaphora in the eucharistic liturgy of both Saints Basil and John Chrysostom, occurring just before the elevation of the host.<sup>28</sup>

7. The text also occurs in a mosaic pavement in Kyrene (Cyrenaica) in modern Libya.<sup>29</sup> It too is a shortened version. Unlike the other inscriptions mentioned, however, we also find there the first part of Psalm 92(93): 5: "Your decrees are very sure" (τὰ μαρτύριά σου ἐπιστώθησαν σφόδρα).

8. The earliest known Greek inscription of Psalm 92(93): 5 on an interior elevation was located at the church of the Dormition in Nicaea (modern Iznik), dated generally to before the 720s.<sup>30</sup> The church was destroyed

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 419, fig. 414.

<sup>24</sup> Ovadiah (1987), p. 14 and Vriezen (1998), p. 251.

<sup>25</sup> Ovadiah (1987), p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> Tzaferis (1996), p. 81-82 and fig. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>28</sup> Brightman (1896), p. 329.

<sup>29</sup> *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 18: 768.

<sup>30</sup> Older studies include Wulff (1903) and Shmit (1927); see most recently Barber (2005).

in 1922, and now only fragments of wall survive. The apse mosaics, however, were recorded in the early twentieth century, and included the famous figure of the Virgin and Child, most likely a replacement for an earlier image destroyed during the period of Iconoclasm (726-843). Above these figures, at the apex of the conch, was an inscription in black glass with a rendering of Psalms 2:7 and 109(110): 3, “I have begotten thee in the womb before the morning star”. Above and surrounding this text, in the framing arch, is Psalm 92 (93): 5 as found at Ereroyk’, Ashkelon-Barne’a, Bahan, and Horvat: τῷ οἴκῳ σου πρέπει ἁγίασμα, Κύριε, εἰς μακρότητα ἡμερῶν. It ran in one line, also in black glass, the entire span of the arch, and was bordered above by decorative triangular motifs and below by a pattern of crosses and rhomboid forms (Fig. 7). Oskar Wulff, one of the early commentators on the inscription, remarked on the extraordinarily monumental appearance of the letters, and their careful distribution so that the KE (Κύριε) appeared just at the apex of the apse, above the Virgin and Child.<sup>31</sup> Without entering into the complicated discussion about the various chronological phases of this mosaic program, it should be stated that both psalm inscriptions are regarded as belonging to the first period of the construction of the church, prior to the alterations made to the mosaic during and after Iconoclasm.<sup>32</sup>

9. Another inscription of Psalm 92(93): 5 occurs in a rock-cut church in Midye (modern Kiyıköy) in Thrace.<sup>33</sup> This inscription is also located in the apse and forms a single line of text. At Midye, however, the text does not occupy the arch above the conch, but rather runs horizontally, at mid-height, across the springing of the semi-dome. It is the shorter version, as found at Erdemli and elsewhere. This text was painted, and was badly damaged by the time of the visits by Semavi Eyice and Nicole Thierry in 1968/9. According to them, the church may possibly date to the early Byzantine period, but the inscription in the apse could be ninth century and is likely to be dated after the period of Iconoclasm.<sup>34</sup>

10. The church of Selymbria (modern Silivri), also in Thrace, bore a mosaic inscription of the longer version of Psalm 92(93): 5 as found at Ereroyk’, Nicaea, and elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> Although the text is now destroyed, a transcription was made John Covel, the seventeenth-century chaplain of

<sup>31</sup> Wulff (1903), p. 199-200; fig. 41.

<sup>32</sup> See Underwood (1959), p. 35-43.

<sup>33</sup> Eyice-Thierry (1970), p. 56; for an illustration, see p. 55, fig. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 76; see also Asdracha (2003), II: p. 249-252.

<sup>35</sup> Magdalino (1978), p. 316 and note 58.

the Levant Company, who visited the church in 1675. According to his account, the text appeared “about ye skirt” of the cupola of the bema.<sup>36</sup> This locution, and his transcription, suggest a single line of text placed, as at Midye, across the apse at mid-height. At either end of the psalm text, Covell records what appear to be five pseudo-alphabetic signs. Paul Magdalino interprets these as Kufesque characters, which are characteristic of middle Byzantine architectural decoration, and accordingly suggests a date for the inscription during this period.<sup>37</sup>

11. A celebrated middle Byzantine church also bears the same psalm quotation in its apse: the Katholikon of the monastery of Hosios Loukas, located in Phokis, in mainland Greece, and dated to c. 1011-1022.<sup>38</sup> As at Nicaea, the mosaic inscription appears on the arch framing the semi-dome of the apse, above an image of the Virgin and Child. Here too, the inscription is in black tesserae.

12. A final example of the Psalm 92(93): 5 inscription is located at the church of the Martorana (St. Mary’s of the Admiral) in Palermo, Sicily.<sup>39</sup> There, it appears in the southern apse of the tripartite sanctuary, running along the arch above a mosaic of Anna. This inscription is damaged; its ending has been replaced by an undulating plant motif that most likely formed part of a fifteenth or sixteenth-century restoration campaign.<sup>40</sup> The text follows that found at Nicaea, Midye, Selymbria, and Hosios Loukas. As Ernst Kitzinger notes in his commentary on the inscription, the selection of the psalm text at Martorana reflects Byzantine conventions of church decoration.<sup>41</sup>

Insofar as the Mren inscription is positioned within the apse, rather than on a pavement or exterior wall of the church, it forms a parallel with the preserved examples from the Byzantine Mediterranean. The church of the Dormition in Nicaea presents a particularly compelling comparison, because of its relatively early date, the text selection (the longer version of the Psalm text, and without the prefix “your decrees are very sure”), and its location in the arch span. Therefore, unlike the Greek inscription of the Psalm at Ereroyk’, which has been connected with Syrian epigraphic

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> See Mathews (1997), p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> Kitzinger (1990), p. 211-212.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 305-306.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 211-12.



practices and church decoration, the Mren inscription seems more persuasively situated within the context of early Byzantine church decoration.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly the contextual evidence supports such a claim, as Mren was constructed during the consolidation of the eastern frontier by the emperor Heraclius in the late 620s and 630s.<sup>43</sup> Heraclius is named in a building inscription extending across the west façade of Mren.<sup>44</sup> He is also identified by scholars on the north portal, in a scene believed to represent the Return of the True Cross to Jerusalem.<sup>45</sup> This combination of epigraphic and visual evidence has been regarded a vivid expression of the “high tide” of Byzantium in Armenia.<sup>46</sup>

#### PSALM 92(93): 5 AND THE LITURGY

The proximity of the Mren inscription to the sanctuary also invites us to consider its liturgical dimensions. Many of the other inscriptions of Psalm 92(93): 5 enumerated above are located close to the altar, whether on a chancel plaque (Erdemli), in the entrance to the choir (Qabr Hiram), just in front of the altar table (Horvat), or in the framing arch of the eastern apse (Nicaea, Selymbria, Midye, and Hosios Loukas). For these reasons, it seems important to consider the psalm inscription at Mren not just as an appropriate allegorical statement about the church building, but also as a frame for the readings and hymns of the liturgy.

In the Armenian liturgy, Psalm 92(93) occurs in many different contexts, including the church dedication rite, the rite of epiphany,<sup>47</sup> in the daily office, and most prominently in the earliest known *enarxis*, or entrance, of the Armenian eucharistic liturgy.<sup>48</sup> In the rite of dedication, it appears in the “Dressing of the Altar”. There are three early textual accounts of this rite: a *maštoc*, or ritual, probably of the late ninth century

<sup>42</sup> For discussion and bibliography of the relationship between Ereroyk’ and Syrian architectural and epigraphic tradition, see Greenwood (2004), p. 59-60.

<sup>43</sup> The literature on Armenian-Byzantine relations in the seventh century is too substantial to be listed here. For an introduction to this era, however, see Haldon (1997); Thomson-Howard-Johnston (1999); Kaegi (2003); and Garsoïan (2012).

<sup>44</sup> Greenwood (2004), *passim*; for an illustration and bibliography of the inscription, see p. 83.

<sup>45</sup> See Thierry (1997) and Maranci (2009).

<sup>46</sup> Whittow (1996), p. 209.

<sup>47</sup> See Conybeare (1905), p. 165. According to the *Armenian Lectionary*, the psalm 92(93) is also intoned on Friday of Eastern Week, while assembled “before the Holy Golgotha.” See Renoux (1969-71), p. 320-321.

<sup>48</sup> Findikyan (1998), p. 104 and Taft (1994), p. 20.

(Venice MS. 457), and two allegorical commentaries on the consecration rite, both dating to the first half of the eighth century, one by Yovhannēs Ōjnec‘i and the other attributed to Step‘anos Siwnec‘i.<sup>49</sup> In the first and second of these sources, Psalm 92(93) is read during the Dressing of the Altar.<sup>50</sup> Venice 457 states: “and having arrived at the holy table at the conclusion of the psalm they clothe the table intoning psalm 92(93), “the Lord reigned, he is robed in majesty” with the *šarakan*, ‘Your table lord of hosts’.”<sup>51</sup> As Findikyan observes, this psalm is also used in the same moment in the Byzantine consecration, the Καθιερώσεως.<sup>52</sup> The earliest source for the Greek rite, *Barberinianus Graecus 336*, records that Psalm 92 is sung one or more times in conjunction with the covering of the altar with a new cloth.<sup>53</sup>

Psalm 92(93) figured prominently in the earliest accounts of the Mid-day Office (*čašow žam*) and the eucharistic liturgy, or *badarak*. In chapter six of the *Commentary on the Liturgy of the Hours* by Step‘anos Siwnec‘i (c. 680-735), “How are the Prayers of the Third Hour to be Understood?,” Psalm 92(93) opens the office, and forms the only reading before the Trisagion.<sup>54</sup> This office, as described by Step‘anos, concludes with the *surb xorxurdn* (Holy Mystery), or eucharist.<sup>55</sup> In the *Offices of the Church of Christ* by Yovhannēs Ōjnec‘i, in reference to the *čašow* antiphon for the Sunday service, a similar structure is presented: “And then the beginning of the office: ‘The Lord reigns, he has robed himself in majesty...’”<sup>56</sup> Thus, according to Robert Taft, Psalm 92(93) constituted the first element, and the only psalm, of the original rite of entrance:

The conclusion seems ineluctable: in Armenia, like everywhere else, the original introit comprised one psalm, in this case Psalm 92/93, with its proper troparion or refrain (*sharakan*).<sup>57</sup>

The prominence of Psalm 92(93) in the early Armenian liturgical tradition offers an important context in which to understand its presence in the sanctuary at Mren. The verse 92(93): 5, painted in large letters, high over the heads of the congregation and clergy, would have produced a

<sup>49</sup> Findikyan (1998).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Ruggieri (1988), p. 88.

<sup>54</sup> Findikyan (2004), p. 437-453.

<sup>55</sup> Taft (1994), p. 19 and note 52.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

visual and textual frame for the action below. One might speculate, further, that the psalm text was chosen not only for its suitability to a church building, but also because of its opening position in the *badarak*. The visual prominence of this text, in any event, would have served to emphasize the first utterances of the service, and set the tone for the solemnities to follow.

It may be relevant, too, that Psalm (92)93 also occurs as the second antiphon of the Byzantine *enarxis*. This is first attested in the commentary of Patriarch Germanus I of Constantinople (d. 730), and is, according to Juan Mateos, a product of Constantinopolitan tradition.<sup>58</sup> Mateos moreover argues that the inclusion of 92(93) represents an already developed stage of the Byzantine liturgy, and that originally, Psalm 94(95) ("Let us go before him with thanksgiving") formed the sole psalm of the *enarxis*. Psalms 91(92) and 92(93) were added as the first two antiphons, Mateos contends, because they are closest to the Psalm 94(95) numerically and because they do not contradict its festal spirit, as does Psalm 93(94).<sup>59</sup> Mateos' assertion regarding the belated emergence of Psalm 92(93) also informs the contention of Taft, supported by Findikyan, that the concurrence of Psalm 92 (93) in both the Byzantine and Armenian rites of entrance is a matter of coincidence rather than connection.<sup>60</sup>

I am in no position directly to address the arguments of these scholars, nor is this the correct place to do so. Yet the epigraphic observations made above raise a few questions. How does Mateos' argument regarding the relatively late entry of Psalm 92(93) into the Byzantine eucharistic liturgy accord with the survey of Greek inscriptions made above, which demonstrates the visual prominence of the psalm in church buildings, and more particularly in areas within or near the sanctuary, already in the sixth century? The inscription of Horvat, in the Negev, is particularly interesting in this regard, as the psalm selection, one will recall, is followed by a quotation from the anaphoral rite. Or are the psalm inscriptions to be regarded in relation to another rite, such as the consecration of the church building? Most basically, what is the relationship between the liturgical and the epigraphic evidence, and should we even assume one? These seem to be important questions for consideration.

<sup>58</sup> Mateos (1971), p. 28-9; 34-45; see also the very useful discussion of this text in Findikyan (2004), p. 450-3.

<sup>59</sup> Mateos (1971), p. 65. I paraphrase here Findikyan's English translation from the French: see Findikyan (2004), p. 453.

<sup>60</sup> Taft (1994), p. 20 and Findikyan (2004), p. 450-453.

Regarding the assertion that the Byzantine and Armenian use of Psalm 92(93) occurred independently, it seems important to emphasize three points: 1) the likely antiquity of the Mren inscription; 2) the formal similarities described above between the inscription of Mren and those on Byzantine monuments noted above; and finally 3) the strong Heraclian associations of the monument, which reflect close contact between Byzantines and Armenians on the seventh-century frontier, demonstrated, as scholars have shown, in military, administrative, social, cultural, linguistic, and confessional spheres. What bearing does the discovery of the inscription at Mren have on the problem of the “coincidence” of Psalm 92(93) in both the Armenian and Byzantine rites of entrance? To what extent should we revisit the possibility of a connection between them? Such questions require an interdisciplinary effort considering both liturgy and the architectural arts.<sup>61</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The apse inscription at Mren offers precious new evidence for the epigraphy of medieval Armenia, and constitutes one of the earliest Armenophone biblical inscriptions. Finding a Greek-language precedent in the south façade inscription of Psalm 92(93): 5 at Ereroyk', the location of the Mren text on the arch of the eastern apse connects it to preserved Byzantine examples, such as the church of the Dormition at Nicaea. The text selection, moreover, may be connected to the Armenian rites of consecration and the eucharist, and raises interesting questions about possible relations with Byzantine liturgical tradition. More work must be done on this inscription, including, first and foremost, a high-quality photographic study (which was not possible during my visits). Given the severely compromised state of the building, this task should be given utmost priority.

<sup>61</sup> A pioneering work of this kind is Mathews (1971). Findikyan has already urged this kind of work regarding Armenian monuments; one hopes, here, at least to emphasize his message.



Fig. 1.  
Mren, c. 638/9. Interior view to East (photo: author)

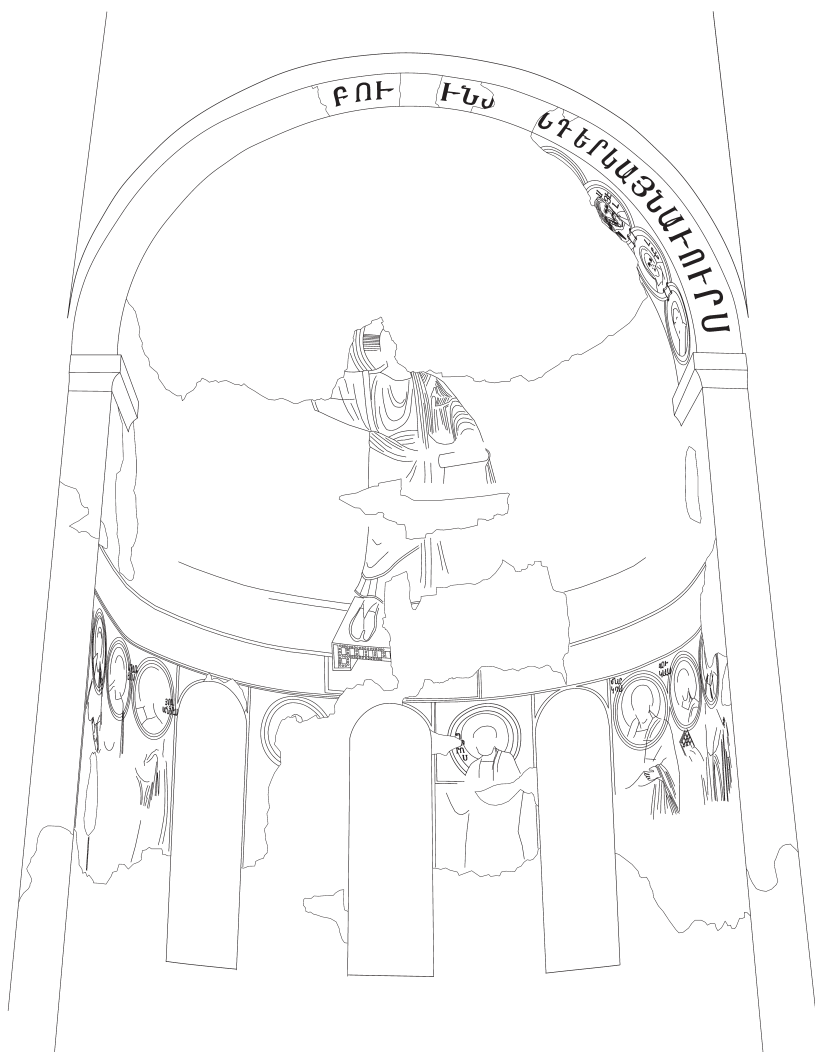


Fig. 2.

Mren, apsidal program with inscription (drawing by Steven Sim)



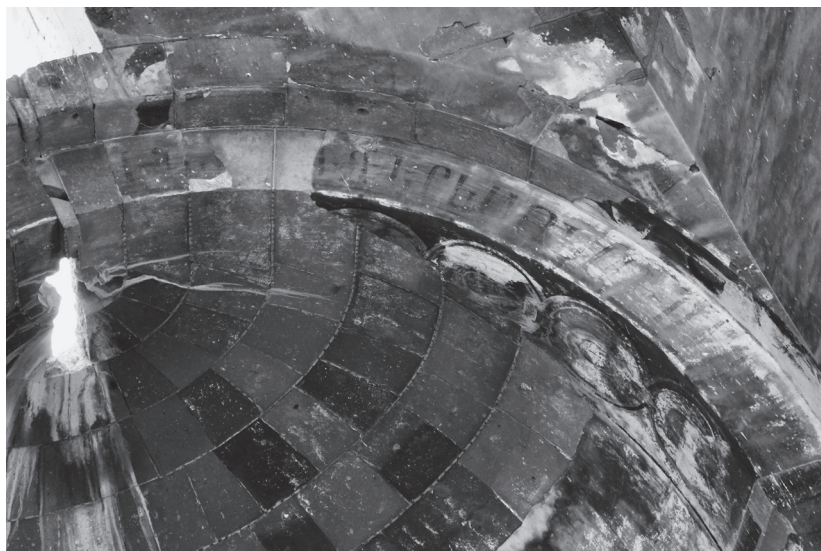


Fig. 3.  
Mren, apsidal inscription, south side (photo: author)



Fig. 4.  
Mren, apsidal inscription, detail (photo: author)



Fig. 5.

Aruč, c. 660, apsidal painting with inscription on scroll (photo: author)

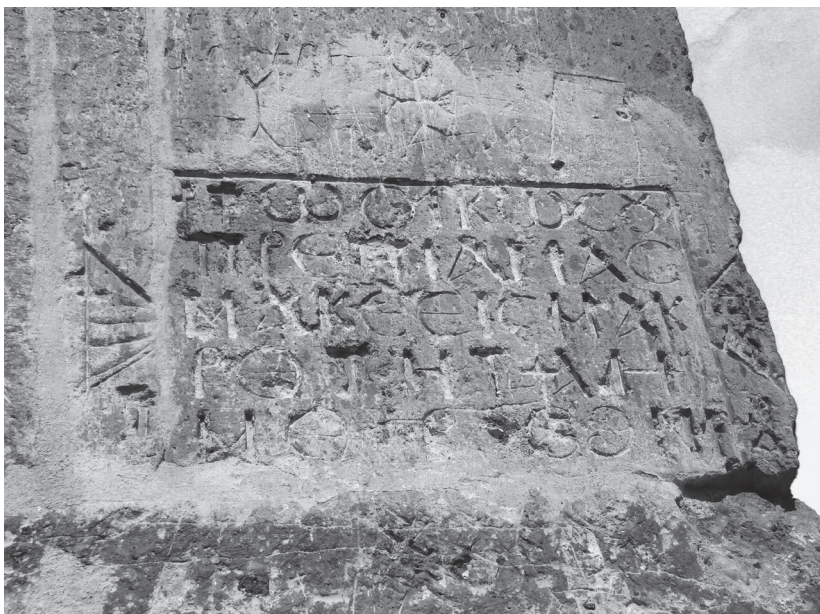


Fig. 6.

Ereroyk', south façade inscription (photo: author)





Fig. 7.

Nicaea, Church of the Dormition, apsidal inscription  
(after O. Wulff, *Die Koimesis Kirche*, 199, fig. 41).

## BIBLIOGRAPHIE

- ASDRACHA  
2003 C. Asdracha. *Inscriptions protobyzantines et byzantines de la Thrace Orientale et de l'île d'Imbros (III<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles). Présentation et commentaire historique* (Athens, 2003).
- BARBER  
2005 C. Barber. "Theotokos and Logos: The Interpretation and Reinterpretation of the Sanctuary Programme at the Koimesis Church, Nicaea" in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot, 2005).
- BRIGHTMAN  
1896 F. E. Brightman. *Liturgies Eastern and Western* (Oxford, 1896).
- CONYBEARE  
1905 F. C. Conybeare and A. J. Maclean. *Rituale Armenorum, being the administration of the sacraments and the breviary rites of the Armenian Church* (Oxford, 1905).
- DAGRON, FEISSEL  
1987 G. Dagron and D. Feissel. *Inscriptions de Cilicie* (Paris, 1987).
- DONABÉDIAN  
2008 P. Donabédian. *L'âge d'or de l'architecture arménienne: VII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Marseille, 2008).
- DONABÉDIAN et al.  
2012 P. Donabédian, P. Baillet, et al. "Nouvelle recherches sur l'ensemble paléochrétien et médiévale d'Ezeruyk en Arménie," *Antiquité Tardive* 20 (2012), p. 315-341.
- DONCEEL-VOÛTE  
1988 P. Donceel Voûte. *Les pavement des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban: Décor, archéologie, liturgie* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1988).
- EYICE, THIERRY  
1970 S. Eyice and N. Thierry. "Le monastère et la source sainte de Midye en Thrace turque," *Cahiers archéologiques* 20 (1970), p. 55-76.
- FINDIKYAN  
1988 M. D. Findikyan. "The Armenian Ritual of the Dedication of a Church: A Textual and Comparative Analysis of Three Early Sources," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 64, no. 1 (1998), p. 75-121.
- Id.  
2004 M. D. Findikyan. *The Commentary on the Armenian Daily Office by Bishop Step'anos Siwnec'i († 735) Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 270 (Rome, 2004).
- GARSOÏAN  
2012 N. G. Garsoïan. *Interregnum: Introduction to a Study on the Formation of Armenian Identity (ca 600-750)*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalia 640 (Louvain, 2012).

- GREENWOOD  
2004 T. Greenwood. “A Corpus of Early Medieval Armenian Inscriptions,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004), p. 27–91.
- HALDON  
1997 J. F. Haldon. *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (rev. ed., Cambridge, 1997).
- JALABERT, MOUTERDE  
1929 L. Jalabert and R. Mouterde. *Les inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* (IGLS) (Paris, 1929).
- KAEGI  
2003 W. E. Kaegi. *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2003).
- KARAPETYAN  
2012 S. Karapetyan. “Mrenə ev nra hušarjannərə [Mren and its Monuments],” *Vardzk/ Duty of Soul* 7 (2012), p. 31–63.
- KITZINGER  
1990 E. Kitzinger. *The Mosaics of Saint Mary’s of the Admiral in Palermo* (Washington, D.C., 1990).
- KOUMJIAN, LEHMANN-STONE  
2001 D. Kouymjian, H. Lehmann, and M.E. Stone. *Album of Armenian Paleography* (Aarhus, 2001).
- MAGDALINO  
1978 P. Magdalino. “Byantine Churches of Selymbria,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 32 (1978), p. 309–318
- MARANCI  
2009 C. Maranci. “The Humble Heraclius: Revisiting the North Portal at Mren,” *Revue des études arméniennes* 31 (2009), p. 359–372.
- Ead.  
2013/14 C. Maranci. “New Observations on the Sanctuary Frescos at Mren,” *Revue des études arméniennes* 35 (2013/4).
- MARR  
1998 N. Marr. “New Material for Armenian Epigraphy,” *Review of the Russian Imperial Archaeological Society, Oriental Section* 8 (1893), p. 82–83 (Russian).
- MATEOS  
1971 J. Mateos. *Le célébration de la parole dans la liturgie byzantine* (Rome, 1971).
- MAT’EVOSYAN  
1987 K. Mat’evosyan. *Aruč* (Érévan, 1987).
- MATHEWS  
1971 T. F. Mathews. *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park, 1971).
- ID.  
1997 T. F. Mathews. “Religious Organization and Church Architecture,” in *Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine*

- Era, A.D. 843-1261*, eds. Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (New York, 1997).
- OVADIAH  
1987 R. Ovadia. *Hellenistic, Roman, and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements in Israel* (Rome, 1987).
- RENOUX  
1969-1971 A. Renoux. *Le Codex Arménien Jérusalem 121. Patrologia Orientalis* 35/1 36/2 (1969-1971).
- RUGGIERI  
1988 V. Ruggieri. "Consacrazione e dedicazione di chiesa secondo Il Barberinianus graecus 336," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 54 (1988), p. 79-118.
- SARGISEAN  
1864 N. Sargisean. *Telagrut'iwkn' i p'ok'r ew i mec Hays* (Venice, 1864).
- SHMIT  
1927 F. I. Shmit. *Die Koimesis Kirche von Nikaia, das Bauwerk und die Mosaiken* (Berlin, 1927).
- TAFT  
1994 R. J. Taft. "The Armenian Liturgy: Its Origins and Characteristics," in *Treasures in Heaven: Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. Thomas F. Mathews and Roger S. Wieck (New York, 1994).
- THOMSON, HOWARD-JOHNSTON  
1999 R. W. Thomson and J. Howard-Johnston, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Translated Texts for Historians 31 (Liverpool, 1999), 2 vols.
- THIERRY, THIERRY  
1971 J.-M and N. Thierry. "La cathédrale de Mren et sa décoration," *Cahiers archéologiques* 21 (1971), p. 43-77.
- THIERRY  
1997 N. Thierry. "Héraclius et la vraie croix en Arménie," in *From Byzantium to Iran: Armenian Studies in Honour of Nina G. Garsoïan*, ed. Jean-Pierre Mahé and Robert W. Thomson (Atlanta, 1997).
- TZAFERIS  
1996 V. Tzaferis. "Greek Inscriptions from the Ancient Church of Horvat Be'er-Shema'," *Erets-Israel* 25 (1996), p. 75-85.
- UNDERWOOD  
1959 P. A. Underwood. "The Evidence of Restorations in the Sanctuary Mosaics in the Church of the Dormition in Nicaea," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959), p. 35-43.
- VRIEZEN  
1998 K. J. H. Vriezen. "Inscriptions in Mosaic Pavements in Byzantine Palestina/Arabia Quoting Texts from the Old Testament," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, eds. L. V. Rutgers and P. W. van der Horst (Leuven, 1998).

WHITTOW

1996

M. Whittow. *The Making of Byzantium, 600–1025* (Berkeley, 1996).

WULFF

1903

O. Wulff. *Die Koimesiskirche in Nicäa and ihre Mosaiken nebst den verwandten kirchlichen Baudenkmälern* (Strasbourg, 1903).